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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of training and follow-up training on teacher aides' effectiveness in the reinforcement of reading skills and motivational techniques introduced by kindergarten and first-grade classroom teachers. The following questions were addressed: (1) are trained assistants rated as more effective than untrained assistants? (2) are trained assistants who participate in a single follow-up session rated as more effective than those with initial training only? and (3) are trained assistants who participate in a second follow-up session rated as more effective than those with only one follow-up session? Participants (N=66) were organized into 2 groups: 44 were enrolled in 40 hours of in-service training, with half selected randomly to participate in either 1 or 2 follow-up sessions; the other 22 served as a control group. Data were gathered utilizing classroom observations and video-taped lessons, with rankings completed by central office administrators. Results indicate that teacher assistants receiving training and follow-up in extending classroom instruction were more effective than those without training, and that those with follow-up training were rated as more effective than those without follow-up training. (LL)

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PERFORMANCE RATINGS OF TEACHER AIDES WITH AND WITHOUT TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP IN EXTENDING READING INSTRUCTION

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Performance Ratings of Teacher Aides With and Without Training and Follow-up in Extending Reading Instruction

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This study was conducted to examine the effects of training, including single and multiple follow-up training, on teacher aides' extension of reading skills (reinforcing skills introduced previously by the classroom teacher) and use of motivation techniques. The aides in this study are paraprofessionals assigned to assist teachers in kindergarten and first grade classrooms in a big-city school district in Missouri.

The following research questions investigated the differences in the rated, observed performance of teacher assistants (i.e., aides) in four groups: 1) Without Training; 2) Training Only; 3) Training with One Follow-up; and, 4) Training with Two Follow-ups.

Are trained assistants rated as more effective than untrained assistants?

Are trained assistants who participate in a single follow-up session rated as more effective than those with initial training only?

Are trained assistants who participate in a second follow-up session rated as more effective than those with only one follow-up session?

Methods and Procedures

Participation in the study was requested by sending applications to all kindergarten-and first-grade teaching assistants in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. Sixty-six respondents were randomly selected from the total number who signed up to attend the training, which introduced a variety of strategies and techniques for reinforcing skills and motivating students. Among those teacher assistants who signed up for training, 44 participated in forty hours of in-service training. The other 22 served as a control group. Among the forty-four trained assistants, 22 were selected randomly to participate in either one or two follow-up sessions (with 11 in each of the latter groups). The reinforcement strategies focused either on decoding skills involving phonics and structural analysis or comprehension skills (Module 1). Motivation techniques involved several aspects, including student involvement, praise, and rewards (Module 2). Teacher assistants had not received any district training in these strategies and techniques prior to their involvement in this study. The training sessions emphasized modeling of and practice in using the strategies and techniques in the two modules. The sessions were held during two consecutive weeks (ten days after school), four hours each day for a total of 40 hours. One follow-up session was held four weeks after the initial training, and the second session four weeks after the first follow-up session. Each follow-up session consisted of four hours of training.

Eleven central office administrators attended a training session which involved the use of a Classroom Observation Form devised by the study director. The Classroom Observation Form used to rate the behaviors of teacher assistants is divided into two Modules (Reading Skills and Motivation Techniques). Each Module lists six behaviors to be assessed on four dimensions (Done Consistently Well, Used at Appropriate Time, Involved Students Most of Time, Maintained Attention of Most Students). The ratings for each dimension range from 1-4 (1 = poor; 4 =

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excellent). Based on support from factor analyses, ratings on the variables also were added together to create global performance scores dealing respectively with Reading Skills Strategies and Motivation Techniques. The observers read and discussed the meaning of the strategies outlined in each of the two modules in which the teacher assistants had received training. The training for observers also included video-taped lessons of teacher assistants providing reinforcement strategies and utilizing motivation techniques in the classroom. The observers practiced identifying and rating the observed behaviors. After completing their ratings, the observers discussed differences in ratings and suggestions were made for improving consistency across raters.

In order to help assess the utility of the training and the validity and reliability of the observations, observers had an opportunity to rate a video lesson of one teacher assistant with experience and training and a video lesson of another assistant without experience or training. Comparison data below in Table 1 (see below) are ratings of the video lessons for these two teacher assistants.

As one would expect if experienced and trained assistants perform better than inexperienced and untrained assistants and the video lessons constitute a valid representation of the two assistants' capabilities, mean ratings on both reading skills strategies and motivation techniques should be significantly and substantially higher for the experienced and trained teacher assistant. The data show that the experienced, trained teacher assistant was consistently rated much higher on both Reading Skills Strategies and Motivation Techniques, respectively, than the inexperienced, untrained teacher assistant. These differences incorporated very large effect sizes. As shown by the low standard deviations, observers were in very close agreement in assigning high ratings to the first assistant and low ratings to the second assistant. These results provide support not just for the reliability of the observers' ratings but also for the utility of the training that was provided to assistants.

In order to determine whether trained assistants were rated as more effective than those who were untrained, and whether assistants trained with follow-up were rated as more effective than those who were trained but without follow-up, one-way analyses of variance were computed using observation ratings provided by the central office administrators. Post-hoc Scheffe tests and multiple t-tests were utilized to assess differences between groups. The groups were categorized as: Group 1: Untrained; Group 2: Trained but no follow-up; Group 3: Trained and one follow-up; and Group 4: Trained and two follow-ups. Analysis of data supported the following findings and conclusions:

1. Using data obtained from observations of specific reading strategies variables (each of six variables rated on four dimensions), Group 1 was significantly lower than the other groups and Group IV was significantly higher than Groups I and II. The same basic pattern was present regarding motivation techniques variables.

2. Analysis of data by group for the global reading strategies and motivation techniques variables also showed that Group I was lower than the other groups on both variables, and Group IV was significantly higher than the other groups on both variables.

Discussion

The data patterns generally supported the conclusion that teacher assistants receiving training and follow-up in extending classroom instruction employ reinforcement strategies for reading skills and motivation techniques more effectively than those without training, and that those with follow-up training are rated as more effective than those without follow-up. All three experimental

groups seemed to benefit from in-service training, since each did better than the Control Group. The results of the study provide empirical evidence for the utility of training teacher assistants with follow-up in order to facilitate improved performance in extending classroom instruction.

In some comparisons single follow-up was found not to differ significantly from training only, and in some cases single and two follow-ups did not differ. These failures to find differences fully in line with the general pattern may be due to the low numbers (i.e., N = 11) in the one and two follow-up groups. But, overall, it appears that one-shot training is not as effective as training with one follow-up. The differences also provide support for training with two follow-ups, in order to ensure skills transfer to the work setting. The data can be interpreted as indicating that teacher assistants are potentially more effective in the instructional process if training incudes two follow-ups provided after assistants begin performing their duties in the classroom. Data collected and analyzed in this study generally support the conclusion that training with follow-up is a desirable means to improve teacher assistants' classroom performance.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Reading Skills Strategies and Motivation Techniques Scores of Two Teachers Shown in Video Lessons Portraying an Experienced, Trained and an Inexperienced, Untrained Paraprofessional

	VIDEO LESSON	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
READING SKILLS	1	4.8	.35
MOTIVATION	1	4.7	.46
READING SKILLS	2	2.1	.26
MOTIVATION	2	2.1	.64

Lesson 1: Teacher assistant had 10 years experience and had received training and follow-up over a period of three years.

Lesson 2: Teacher assistant was first-year employee with no training.